

Looking Toward a New Day

Spring 2020



GEORGIA VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION AGENCY

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Editor's Note: As GVRA adapts to quickly changing times, it is important that this publication adapt as well. In the immediate future, we have decided to publish this newsletter on a seasonal schedule. As we review how to best share agency information and successes with the greater public, we want to welcome your feedback. Suggestions, success stories or general feedback can be sent to communications@gvs.ga.gov.

All images in this publication were taken prior to the implementation of social distancing guidelines.

Thank you.

***The GVRA Office of
External Affairs***



A Letter From Executive Director Shawn Ryan

The world in which we live and consequently, the way we operate, has certainly changed in the past few weeks. Counselors and clients find themselves reviewing employment plans by phone instead of in the office. Departments conduct staff meetings on digital platforms, sometimes offering glimpses into coworkers' homes, with children and pets occasionally making surprise appearances. In our personal lives, we strive to find ways to get the supplies and services our families need and stay connected with loved ones, while still following social distancing protocol.

It is easy to become overwhelmed during these unprecedented times. I hope all our staff find some comfort in that current deviations from the norm are not punitive measures, but the manifestation of our caring and concern for our fellow citizens, including many of those in the disability community.

I encourage each you to stay the course, focus on brighter days ahead, and remember our hard work has the potential to help to ease economic burdens on our fellow Georgians.

Shawn Ryan
GVRA Executive Director



Get to Know a Legislator

This Month We Feature Richard Smith

Provided by the Georgia General Assembly



Richard Smith was born in Wrightsville, Georgia. Later, Richard moved to Madison, Georgia, where he graduated from Morgan County High School. Upon completion of high school, he earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Louisiana State University (1968) and a Master of Science degree from the University of Florida (1970).

While at Louisiana State University, Richard was inducted into the honorary fraternity, Alpha Zeta. In 1970, Richard began his career with the University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service. In 1978, he transferred to the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service. During his tenure there, he served in Statesboro, Cedartown and Columbus. While serving as extension director, he also served as an adjunct faculty member of the UGA Fanning Leadership Center from 1990 until 1999.

Richard is no stranger to public service.

Prior to being elected as the state representative for House District 131 (currently House District 134), Richard served as:

- Interim City Manager for the Columbus Consolidated Government: December 1989 until March of 1990;
- Columbus City Councilor: 1999 – 2002. At-large post, serving one year as budget chair;
- Chattahoochee Valley Community Foundation, founding board member;
- Chattahoochee Valley Fair and Exposition, president;
- Columbus Downtown Rotary Club, member;
- First Baptist Church of Columbus, member.

Richard was first elected to the Georgia House of Representatives on November 2, 2004, and sworn in on January 10, 2005. Richard is currently serving his 8th term in the Georgia House of Representatives, where he represents portions of Muscogee and Harris counties.

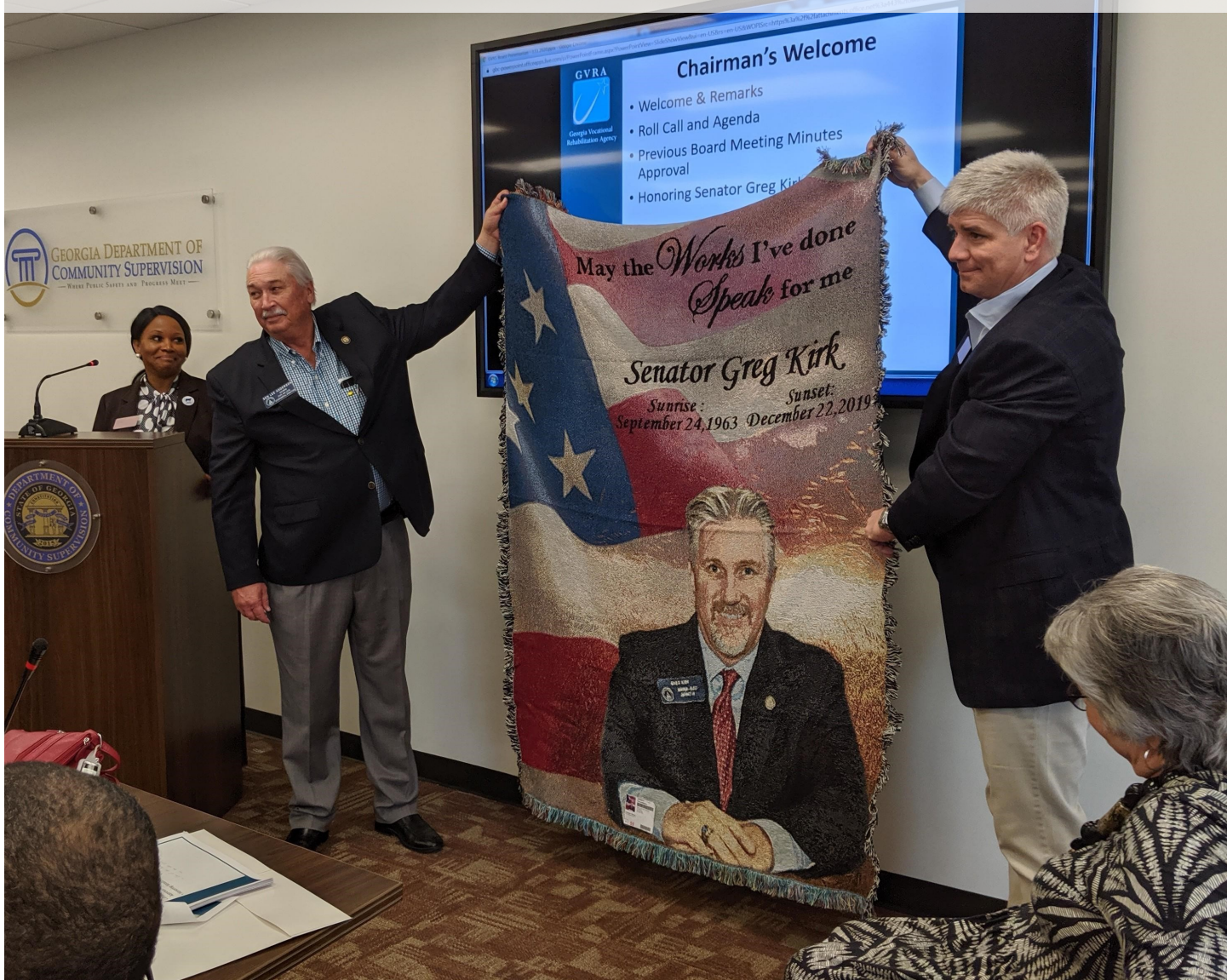


Remembering Greg Kirk

Honoring the Late Senator at the March GVRS Meeting



The Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Board honored the late Senator Greg Kirk at its March board meeting. Sen. Kirk was a founding member of the GVRS board and a champion of the disability community as a whole. From top left and clockwise: Board Chair Tom Wilson with Ms. Kirk. Members of the Georgia General Assembly listen as speakers remember Sen. Kirk. Legislators hold up a blanket given to the Kirk family in honor of the late senator.



The GVRA Admin Leadership Team

Meet the Team

Over the past several months, GVRA has worked to fill out the administrative leadership team. Below, you'll find brief bios on each of these team members.

Monica Bradshaw **Chief Financial Officer**

Monica most recently served as Director of Finance Shared Services for the State Accounting Office, bringing over 20 years of progressive financial management experience in the areas of accounting, financial reporting and analysis, budgeting and strategic planning from the private sector.

Monica began her tenure with the State of Georgia in 2006 working on a project that streamlined the banking structure and internal business processes for the entire state. Following that assignment, she joined the Department of Pardons and Paroles as Revenue and Payroll Manager, where she worked to transition that agency to the Payroll Shared Services model. In 2010, Monica returned to the State Accounting Office (SAO) to head the Working Capital Optimization Initiative, leading the effort to gain efficiencies in vendor management, AP workflow, banking structure and the bank reconciliation process. In that role, Monica led the Shared Services efforts for Accounts Payable, Procurement, Accounts Receivable, Cash Management and Vendor Management.

Monica holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from Tennessee State University in Nashville, TN. She serves on the Board of Directors for Decatur Christian Senior Housing, a non-profit senior housing facility.

Zain Farooqui **General Counsel**

Zain Farooqui has spent his entire legal career in the public sector, with over a decade of experience working in state government in Georgia. Prior to joining GVRA, he served as Associate General Counsel for the Georgia Department of Public Health, where he was the chief legal advisor to the Office of Emergency Preparedness & Response and the Office of Emergency Medical Services & Trauma. Zain previously worked at the Georgia Department of Human Services, where he served as a legal policy specialist and legislative liaison. Prior to moving to Georgia in 2008, Zain was an attorney for the City of New York where he litigated in child abuse and neglect proceedings in state court. He earned a juris doctorate degree from Quinnipiac University School of Law and holds a master's degree in Health Administration from the same institution. In addition, he received a bachelor's degree in public health from Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs.

Robin Folsom **Director of External Affairs**

Robin has 23 years of experience in government affairs, economic development, communications and media relations. She originally joined GVRA as Marketing Manager, eventually becoming Director of Communications and Marketing. In that role, Robin developed the agency's first strategic marketing plan with annual goals and measurable benchmarks. She also established an extensive collection of video, web and print assets to support coworkers in the field with key outreach tools in accessible formats.



Prior to joining GVRA, Robin worked both on and off air in television news for a decade. She also served at the Georgia Department of Labor as Director of Workforce Development Finance Programs and at the Governor's Office of Workforce Development as program coordinator for the Georgia Work Ready initiative.

In her new capacity, Robin oversees legislative affairs, board and council relations, communications and marketing. She will prioritize timely communication and maximization of resources dedicated to outreach. One of her first goals is providing agency-wide visibility into the administrative support services available in the new organizational structure.

Jessime McGarity
Director of Planning and Budget

Jessime has nearly two decades of budget, assets management and policy experience. She joins GVRA from the City of Atlanta, where she most recently served as Director of Budget Administration for the past five years. There, she formulated and executed a complex operating and capital budget totaling over \$8 billion annually. She also facilitated and coordinated strategic and long-range planning activities as well as developed and implemented policy and budgetary initiatives. Prior to her work with the city, she was a Revenue Investment Supervisor with MARTA, where she organized and managed the Accounts Receivables and Revenue/Investment functions for the Accounting Department. She was responsible for over \$100 million in fare revenue recognition, bank reconciliations activities, aging and debt reporting.

At GVRA, Jessime will prioritize accessibility of information and alignment of the budget with program

goals. In her first 30 days, she will work closely with GVRA programs to provide greater visibility and transparency into budgets versus actual expense performance.

Don Privitera
Chief Information Officer

Don Privitera brings over 30 years of technology experience to GVRA. Don began his technical career in 1990, developing commercial software for nearly a decade before transitioning into Information Technology (IT) management. As an IT leader, he directed all aspects of a security systems business and identified cybersecurity as a strategic initiative. In 2017, he obtained a Graduate Certificate in IT Security and then graduated a year later with a Masters of IT degree from Kennesaw State University (KSU). Don was a presenter at National Cyber Summit 2018 and has also published several broadly circulated papers on cybersecurity. He has taught IT and cybersecurity classes part-time at KSU. Most recently, Don helped a cybersecurity firm develop its business model.

Hammad Sleiman
Property and Facilities Director

Hammad comes to GVRA from the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), where he served as Building Construction Project Manager. Prior to joining state government, he spent six years as a Facility Manager in Doha, Qatar. He holds a Bachelor of Economics degree, a Master of Conflict Management degree, and is currently pursuing a Master of Building Construction and Facilities Management degree at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Hammad says he is honored to be a part of the GVRA team and looks forward to meeting many of you in person.

Jennifer Statham
Director of Human Resources

Jennifer Statham has over 22 years of state government Human Resources experience, including ten years in management roles. Over the course of her career, Jennifer has worked in all areas of HR at both the agency and enterprise level. Her areas of expertise include talent management, classification and compensation, operations and benefits, training and employee relations. She spent four years working at the state enterprise level assessing agency HR practices, recommending corrective actions and developing and leading strategic enterprise-wide initiatives to promote HR compliance

within state government. Prior to joining GVRA, Jennifer held the role of Sr. Human Resources Manager with the Department of Juvenile Justice and, most recently, the Department of Early Care and Learning. She possesses a SHRM-SCP certification.

A Friendly Reminder


We Can All Do Our Part

THE PRESIDENT'S **CORONAVIRUS** GUIDELINES FOR AMERICA

DO YOUR PART TO SLOW THE SPREAD



Do work and school **from home**



If you work in a critical infrastructure industry, **keep your normal work schedule** and follow CDC guidance



Avoid social gatherings of 10+ people



Practice **good hygiene**



Use **drive-thru, pickup, or food delivery** options



Avoid nonessential travel, shopping trips, and social visits



Do not visit nursing homes or long-term care facilities unless to provide critical help

Follow the directions of your state and local authorities.
For more information, visit: **CORONAVIRUS.GOV**



A New Generation of Leaders

The 2020 RWS Leadership Redwood Class



The 2020 Leadership Redwood class at Roosevelt Warm Springs met for the first time on January 22. In the front row left to right are Coach Quardez Warrior, Wanda Johnson, Lisa Waddell, Lauren Brooks, Pam Stewart, Patrick Smith, Ken Tay and Coach Janie Henderson. In the second row are Eddie Etim, Mitch Sanders, Jonathon Buxton and Matt Dorman. The class will meet regularly throughout 2020 to enhance their leadership skills, participate in team building exercises and work on a project to benefit the organization.

AWT Shows How It's Done



On January 13, 2020, Eve Harrell, Mark Bresler, and Celeste True from Assistive Work Technology provided a hands-on presentation to the Dublin staff, including Counselors, Counselor Assistants, Career Specialists, and interns. The AWT team introduced several types of assistive technology that can help clients they serve. Some of the Technology demonstrated include Livescribe smartpen, Otter.ai, Audionote app with Bluetooth keyboard, Seeing ai app, and Photomath app.

Knowing Yourself

One Client's Story

Trevor Bottiglieri knew he wanted to help people from a young age. He remembered helping around the house when his grandparents were ill, and he saw the compassion and comfort they received from their caretakers. With his mother working in the medical field herself, Trevor dreamed of both following in her footsteps and having the opportunity to give back to society as a whole.

After first enrolling in Vocational Rehabilitation services in late 2017, Trevor applied for and was accepted into the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program at Roosevelt Warm Springs.

"My time at Warm Springs was great," Trevor said. "I wanted to try something to make a difference in the medical field and gain experience and knowledge and nursing related tasks. The teachers were very helpful and wonderful. I made a lot of great contacts with them."

Following his graduation in June of last year, Trevor began work as a CNA at The Landing, a senior care center in Columbus. But even then, he wasn't done dreaming. Trevor is now enrolled at Georgia Military College where he is working to earn licensure as a physical therapist.

"I realize that I can contribute to society by helping people," he said. "That's something I want to do."

Cherika Bohannon, his VR Counselor, said he was a model client, and she imagines big things in store for Trevor in the future.

"The services Trevor obtained from VR and RWS has helped him to obtain a CNA Certification and additional computer skills needed to become a productive citizen in his community," she said. "Trevor is an

independent young man who has overcome many obstacles with his strong self-advocacy skills and the support of his family. Trevor does not let his disability define who he is or what he can accomplish in life. He always strives to put his best efforts forward."



Open For Business

BEP Feeds New Judicial Center Workers



Jerome Davis, owner and manager of the Judicial Café in the new Georgia Judicial Complex, says he's excited about connecting employees at the site with healthy meals and snacks. The site becomes yet another Business Enterprise Program managed location on Capitol Hill.



Way to Go!

The DAS Employee of the Month for December 2020

The following nomination was submitted by Takeeya Lee in the category of Teamwork.

I am nominating Ms. Allison Walker for her outstanding teamwork in addition to her exceptional customer service within the Customer Service Unit. Allison arrives to work on time each day prepared to take on any challenges thrown her way. When we are short-staffed, she always volunteers to cover for the absent employee, often taking the initiative to complete work before she is asked. She always offers to assist any team member who is falling behind all while also being attentive to incoming calls. Last month we had a few people out of the office and fell extremely behind in our workload, and Ms. Walker helped us bridge the gap.

Ms. Walker completed the following actions within a week as an attempt to keep the unit on task: 130 status updates that included bar code creation for Authorized Representatives to submit MER to the claims, 51 Congressional clearances, 76

follow-up emails on Congressional cases, and she responded to 295 emails between our Congressional contacts.

In addition, she assisted with covering the phones during lunches and all incoming calls after 3:30 pm. I have received several calls about her professionalism and ability to show compassion when assisting not only the claimant but also hospitals and authorized representatives.

Ms. Walker is pleasure to work with as she always has a positive attitude and great communication skills. She is the master of multi-tasking, and I am honored to have her on my team. I am submitting this write up as a personal thank-you so she knows she is extremely valued and appreciated.



Rising to the Challenge

The DAS Employees of the Month for Jan. and Feb.

The following nomination was submitted by Balencia Stallings in the category of Customer Service:

I would like to nominate Karena Mathews for employee of the month. Karena works very hard and is efficient when it comes to completing tasks and other assignments. She has great scheduling, time management and organizational skills. Karena often exceeds expectations and happily accepts other assignments with enthusiasm.

Although her performance is remarkable, her soft skills are also worth noting. Karena has a strong work ethic and is detail-oriented, and her work product reflects this level of dedication. Since becoming a Lead Customer Service Representative (CSR), she has acquired additional duties and greater responsibilities, but is still a team player, often spearheading activities and assisting others in the unit. She has a happy countenance and is very humble.

The skills that Karena possesses would make anyone happy to have her on their team. She is an asset to the Consultative Exam Scheduling Unit (CESU) as well as to the program as a whole. We're glad that she's a part of the CESU Team.



The following nomination was submitted by Anita Thompson in the category of Teamwork:

I would like to nominate Kimberly Walker as employee of the month. Kim is an Adjudication Officer assigned to Unit 48 - South Region Claims Processing Team.

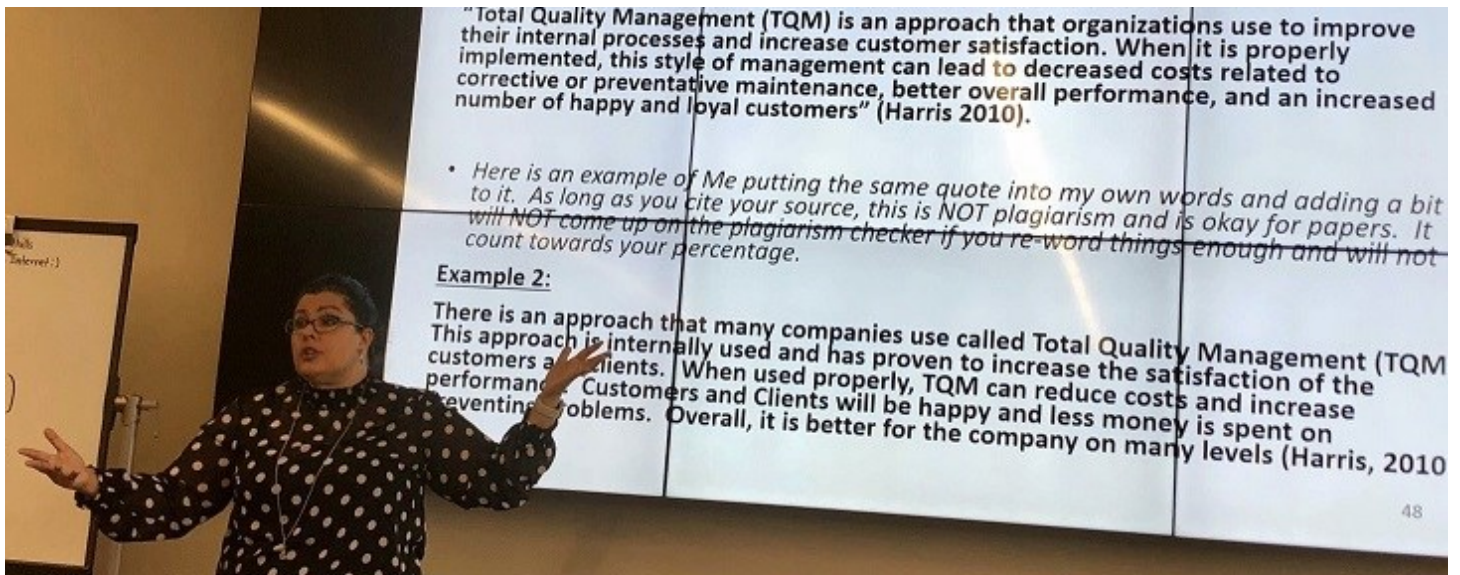
Kim exemplifies teamwork and agency commitment. She took the initiative to assist a unit member who was having some difficulty with organizing and prioritizing her work. She mentored the colleague and provided her with tips on organizing and prioritizing her workload. Because of Kim's assistance, the unit member was able to decrease her caseload size by almost 20 cases within a short period of time.

Kim's action characterizes true dedication to teamwork as well as commitment to the program's mission. Kimberly Walker is a valuable asset to Unit 48. I applaud her efforts in assisting others.

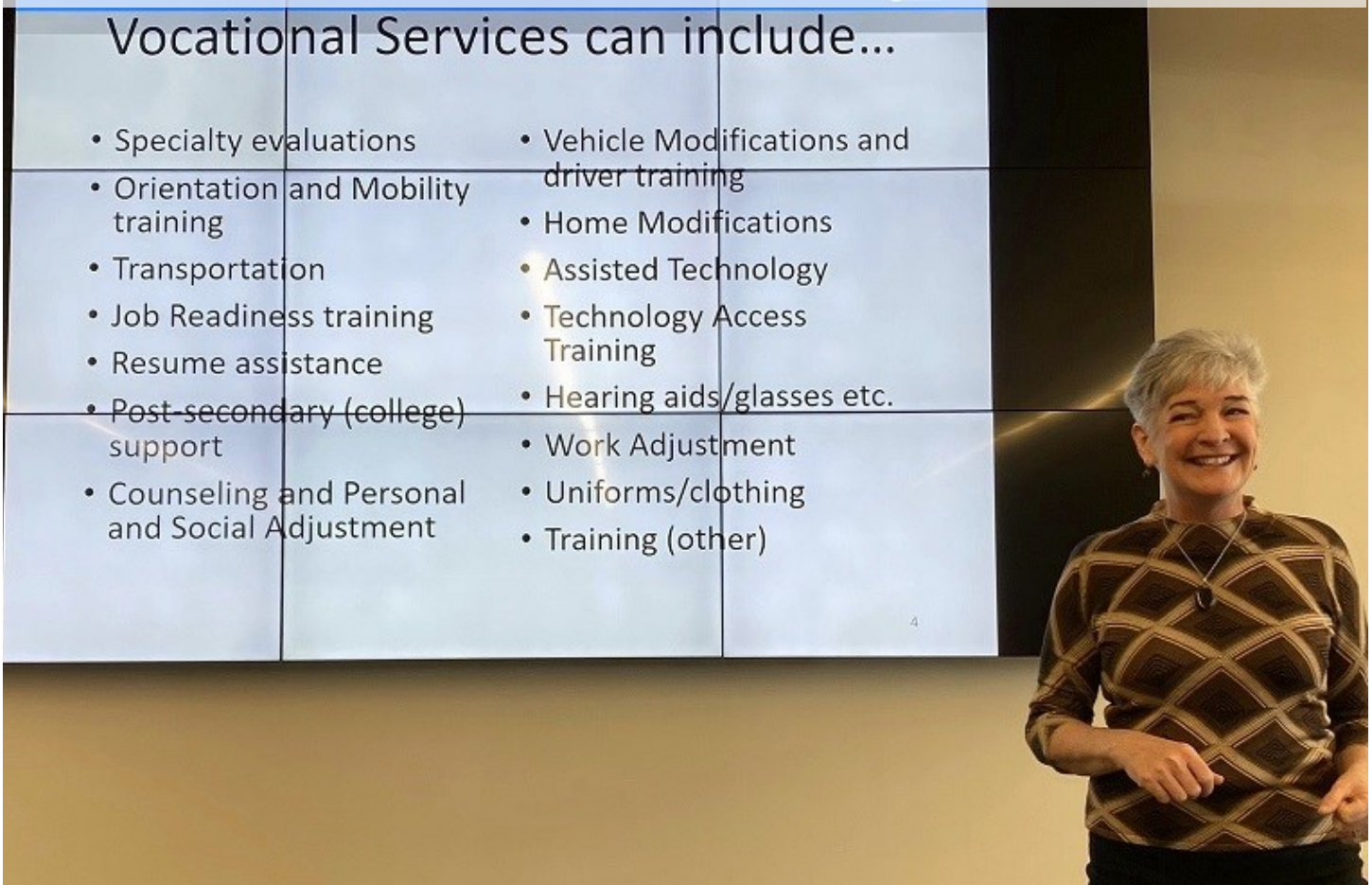


Out and About

AWT Presents at Regional Consortium



In late January, AWT East Quadrant members ran a 2.5 hour workshop for the Regional AT Consortia for the Northeast Georgia RESA group providing tools for community access, education, and job site skills. Presenters were Mycael Spear – Rehabilitation Technician and Eileen Murphy (below) and Shandra Spear (above) – both Rehabilitation Technologists. The presentation was well received and the team was invited to speak in February at the NEGATT 2020 Northeast GA Disability Conference and Expo.



... And that's not all

AWT Staff Teaches Local Grad Students in late January



Every semester the AWT Team does a presentation for the course “Assistive Technology and Environmental Assessment and Intervention Across the Lifespan” at Georgia State University. This year’s presentation was part of a 4 hour demonstration on assistive technology and included information about GVRA as well as hands-on demonstrations of products. Presenters were Grant Jerkins – AWT Team Lead West Quadrant, as well as Eileen Murphy and Shandra Spear – Rehabilitation Technologists East Quadrant.



Getting Down to Business

Employment First Council Files Second Report

Since late 2008, the Employment First (E1) Council has met six times total and recently filed its second full report to the Governor's Office and the Georgia General Assembly.

"The council is really beginning to address matters that will lead to competitive integrated employment for those with disabilities," said GVRA Legislative Liaison Chuck Stone, who is spearheading policy aspects of the Council.

The latest report discusses assistive technology and the significant part it plays in supported employment. On the whole, use of assistive technology can significantly cut down on the cost of supported employment, saving the taxpayers money and ensuring Georgians with disabilities have the tools they need to succeed in the workforce.

Stone noted that second report also outlines the disparity between community resource providers and supported employment initiatives. The report urges the legislature to bring parity to this specific funding stream, effectively ensuring supported employment training is provided as a first option, which in turn would lead to more individuals transitioning to competitive integrated employment settings.

The report outlines what goals the Council achieved in its first year of work. They include the following:

- Compiled a database of all the funding attached to Employment First related matters.
- Determined all programs, agencies and other organizations that play a part in Employment First matters.
- Documented the experience of people

with disabilities who apply for services or assist agencies with the goal of ultimately creating a more effective system for the provider and consumer.

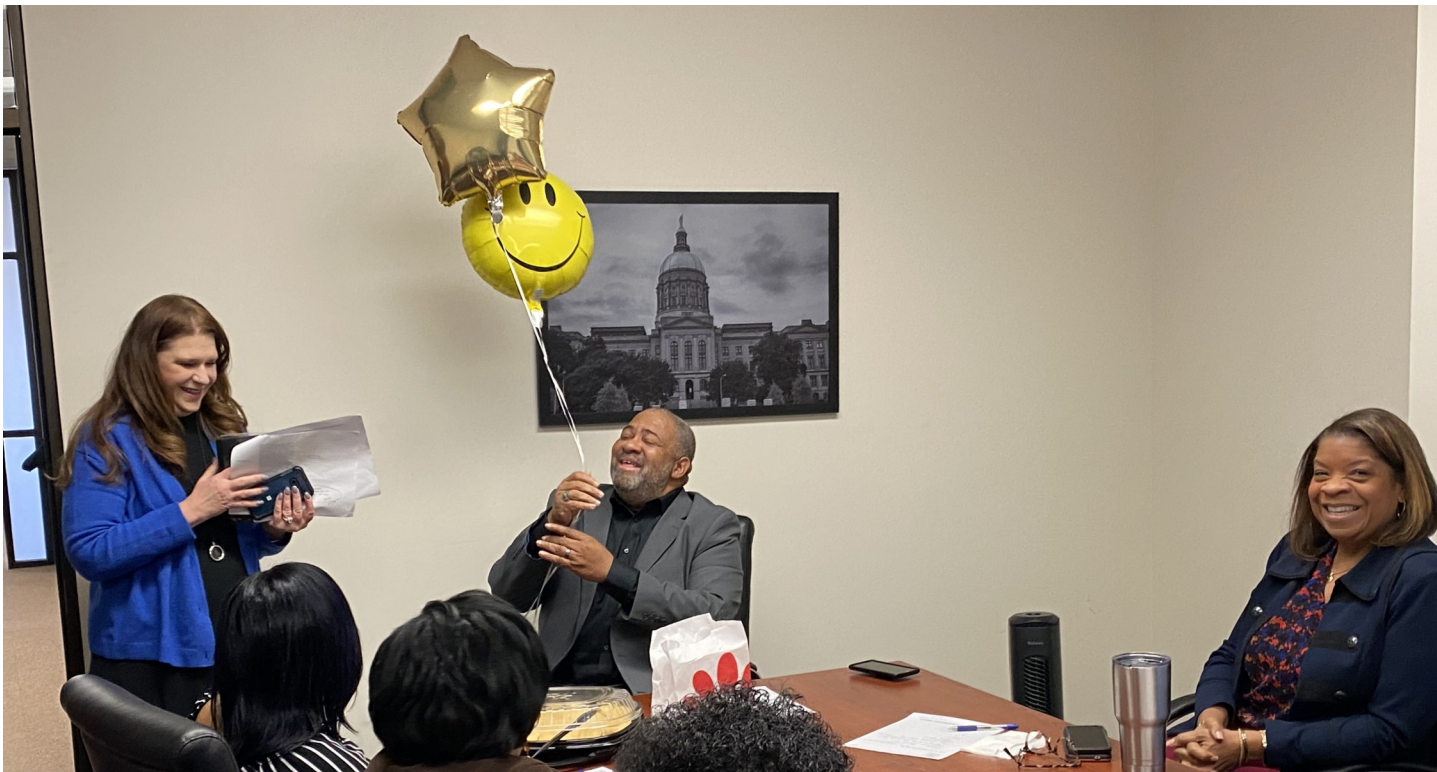
- Explored all agreements, memorandums of understanding, and other engagements of the represented state agencies.

The next E1 Council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 5th. The goal at that time will be to finalize the council's first report of 2020 and its third overall. Work groups are working in the meantime to ensure the report is both comprehensive and made available to the Legislature in a timely manner.



Congratulations!

Recognizing a Job Well Done



Recently, Raymond Lanier, accounts manager at GVRA, was recognized by temp employee scheduler FOCUS for his work with the agency while he was a temporary employee. He was recognized by Rhonda Twyman who noted Raymond always goes “the extra mile” in helping coworkers complete tasks. Congratulations, Raymond!



Happy Trails

Scenes from Kathy Yates' Retirement



Kathy Yates recently retired from Roosevelt Warm Springs after 36 years of service where she last worked as the manager over the Counseling and Case Management Department. Here she is pictured with her husband and RWS employee Danny Yates (left) and her sister Sue Blackmon (right).



**The future doesn't belong
to the fainthearted.
It belongs
to the brave.
~ Ronald Reagan**

GVRA and COVID

With so much information going out about COVID-19 and GVRA's subsequent response, we wanted to provide a "one-stop shop" for all the information that GVRA has shared with staff and clients in recent days. Now, staff and members of the public alike can go to our website at www.gvs.ga.gov where they'll see a menu box titled "COVID-19 and GVRA." We've divided the information on the site into sections for staff and the public at large, though much of the information has the potential to impact both groups. If you have any questions, please email john.boan@gvs.ga.gov, and please check back often. The list will be updated as more information/resources are communicated. Please note that as new information becomes known, some of the items may no longer be applicable. We will attempt to remove them as soon as it becomes clear the information contained therein is no longer correct.

Stay safe, everyone.

www.gvs.ga.gov

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